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ABSTRACT

In a response to the National Governors Association (NGA) goals and objectives related to second language study, the Joint National Committee for Languages (JNCL) makes a case in support of 10 NGA principles for change. It is emphasized that the study of a second language must remain an essential component of any efforts to improve the quality of American education, that opportunities for language study be available for all students by the year 2000, and that more students develop higher levels of second-language proficiency. More teachers will be needed at all levels and questions of articulation must be addressed. More course offerings in less commonly taught languages are needed, along with more appropriate assessment strategies and new teaching strategies to address the variety of learner strategies used by the wider pool of students. Language instruction also must be integrated with other disciplines, and the needs of limited English proficient students, who should be perceived as a resource rather than a problem, should be examined more carefully. Concrete examples show what is currently being done in relation to each NGA principle. A list giving the titles of 20 supporting documents is appended. (LB)

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Language Study and Educational Improvement

A Response to the National Governors' Association

Presented by

The Policy Committee

of the

Joint National Committee for Languages

May 1990

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Language Study and Educational Improvement: A Response to the National Governors' Association

Introduction

The study of a second language is, and must remain, an essential component of any efforts to improve the quality of education in this nation. It is imperative that opportunities for language study be available for *all* students by the year 2000, and that more students develop higher levels of proficiency. The dramatic changes sweeping the world indicate that those without language skills will soon find themselve at a considerable disadvantage. Communication in multiple languages fosters a sense of humanity and friendship and prepares students for a world in which nations and peoples are increasingly interdependent.

There is still much to be done before this goal becomes a reality. Developing true proficiency in a second language, like a first language, takes time, and very few places in this nation give students that time. To make multiple language skills a reality for our students, we will need more teachers prepared at all levels of education, with greatly expanded opportunities for continued improvement, particularly of language skills. To start language programs at earlier years and develop longer sequences, we must address questions of articulation among the various levels and instruction of students at higher levels of proficiency. We must expand course offerings to include the less commonly taught languages. New teaching strategies must be used to address the variety of learner strategies used by the wider pool of students who will be studying languages, and more appropriate assessment instruments must be found. Language instruction must somehow be integrated with other disciplines to make the most of an already crowded curriculum. The needs of limited English proficient students must be addressed more carefully, and they must be perceived as a resource rather than a problem.

Many of these concerns are shared by our colleagues in other disciplines; others are unique to the language profession. Nevertheless, second language educators in this nation are ready to meet these challenges and have already made many advances in addressing them.

The nation's governors have agreed to six major goals and twenty-six objectives for educational improvement by the year 2000. Two objectives directly relate to second language study; others are more indirectly related. Additionally, ten principles for change have been proposed which should guide all efforts to meet these goals and objectives. We believe that current advances in our field can provide a model for this effort. The following document shows how our work addresses the concerns of the governors, what improvements can be made to further this progress, and concrete examples of what is being done.

Language Study and the Principles for Change

All students can learn at high levels; a commitment to success for all students must be pervasive throughout the system.

Research and empirical evidence show that all students can learn some aspects of communication skills in a second language, and language study has something to offer to the whole spectrum of the student population. In addition to enabling students to function in more than one language, second language study strengthens the development of the basic skills, creative inquiry, and critical thinking. Language study also develops cross-cultural understanding of both the interconnectedness and uniqueness of various societies as well as a deeper self-concept and appreciation of one's own culture.

* A 1970-76 study of elementary school students taking Latin in Philadelphia showed that these students scored one full year higher than the control group on the vocabulary subtest of the Iowa Skills Test. The study also found that the students of Latin, primarily from inner-city schools, were performing at grade level while the control group had fallen one year behind. A similar study in Washington, DC showed that sixth-grade students who had taken a second language (in this case, Latin, French, or Spanish) scored significantly higher on tests of vocabulary, comprehension, and total reading skills.

* A 1979 study found a positive correlation between language study and higher ACT scores. A significant finding of this research was that the improvement was indeed due to the second language study and not the overall intelligence level of the student. [See Attachment P]

* The New York State Board of Regents approved its *Action Plan to Improve Elementary and Secondary Education Results in New York* in 1984. This plan embodies the idea that all children are capable of learning at high levels. Included in that plan is a commitment to second language education for all students. Beginning with the class of 1994, all students will take at least two years of a second language prior to grade 9, and additional incentives for continuing language study are made in the form of requirements for the Regents' Diploma. [see Attachment L]

The system must be outcome or performance-based.

Second language instruction has changed dramatically in the last few years. Gone are the days of rote memorization of vocabulary words and grammatical structures. Students are now taught in a manner which enables them to *use* the target language at whatever level they are currently studying. The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Proficiency Guidelines were released in 1986. Their purpose was to identify stages of proficiency, instead of achievement, in second language learning in the areas of listening,

speaking, reading, and writing. The guidelines have been used extensively in curriculum development around the country for helping to define expected learner outcomes at each level of instruction, regardless of methodology used. [see Attachments B, D, and J]

There must be consequences--incentives for improvement, sanctions for failure--linked to performance.

Concerned with helping students achieve the highest levels of language proficiency possible, the language teaching profession wholeheartedly endorses the use of performance-based criteria in second language teaching and testing. We urge school boards, state agencies, and granting agencies to provide incentives in the form of supplementary funding for secondary and postsecondary institutions that:

* offer full sequences of study leading to advanced levels of proficiency;

* establish full-sequence programs in the less commonly taught languages; or

* find ways to reward students who reach higher levels of proficiency.

Funding agencies can also help support study-abroad programs or programs for majors, especially those designed to train future teachers.

* The University of Minnesota, Minneapolis has instituted proficiency requirements in language in place of traditional "seat-time" requirements and encourages the study of less commonly taught languages by giving credit for first-year instruction in these language and not in the commonly taught languages (French, German and Spanish) [see Attachment I]

* The State of Florida provides matching funds to local school districts for FLES (Foreign Languages in Elementary Schools) programs. The number of school districts participating has grown from 13 in 1982-83 to 27 in 1988-89.

* The State of Iowa appropriated $110,000 for academic year 1988-89 for use as grants to schools to encourage planning and implementation of K-8 language programs.

Curriculum and instruction must promote active engagement and the acquisition and application of higher-order skills for all students

Higher-order thinking skills are an intrinsic part of instruction in a second language. The study of another language by definition presents a framework for learners to reason out the components of the new language in contrast and comparison to their native language. It deepens the learners' insights into their native language and culture by revealing new meanings of words and their nuances. Research shows an increase in proportion to the number of years of second language study in SAT verbal and mathematics scores of those

who studied a second language over those who have not. Language students also score significantly higher on tests of creativity, a critical component of a curriculum which supports the learning of thinking skills as well as content and substance.

The introduction of another language during the early grades for all students is critical to achieving the goals defined by this principle. It simply will not do for our schools to produce only a small elite with the skills and content knowledge to meet the future scientific, economic, and cultural needs of this society. In addition, a long sequence of language study should be available to all students throughout their K-12 education, to provide us with enough personnel in all our enterprises here and abroad who are able to communicate in another language and who are familiar with at least one other culture.

Assessment strategies and tools must reflect the higher-order outcomes we need.

In language assessment, instruments must respect the fact that language is used to perform tasks--a whole range of tasks--not only tasks where language "does" certain things, but also where it "represents" certain things. The degree to which a learner's language accomplishes a specific task must be the most important factor in assessment.

Language assessment strategies must continue to focus on gains in real proficiency. Appropriate measurement instruments for determining proficiency in listening, speaking, reading and writing must be developed. These instruments can then be utilized to measure second language learning in a way that is meaningful and supportive of the acquisition of higher-order outcomes.

* During the 1980s, under the leadership of ACTFL and the U.S. Government Interagency Language Roundtable, second language educators moved away from the testing of achievement to the testing of overall global proficiency in a language. In such assessment, the student must demonstrate an ability to apply acquired language skills to respond appropriately to a wide variety of unrehearsed situations. Large numbers of language professionals have been trained in techniques for assessing oral language performance, and extensive work has been done in considering the implication of what has been learned from these efforts for the teaching of second languages. [see Attachment A]

* The first Connecticut Assessment of Educational Progress in Foreign Languages was conducted in 1987 to determine the status of second language education in the state. Based on ACTFL's guidelines, students were tested in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Rather than testing for minimum standards of achievement, they sought to determine students' abilities to perform specific tasks.

School-based staff must have authority to determine the best strategies and use of resources to achieve desired outcomes.

The nature of reform efforts since 1983 has been to add more mandates for all concerned in the K-12 system: more tests, more academic courses, more certification requirements, more relicensing and training requirements, and more accreditation standards, for example. Fortunately, there appears to be another wave of reforms appearing of late, those which emphasize the teacher as a skilled professional. Recommendations include enhancing teacher status, changing pre- and in-service education dramatically, and moving toward school-based management and new school structures. Educators at all levels should applaud these recent efforts to rely on the good judgment and experience of local teachers and principals.

Language teachers are often among the most active in their schools. They are engaged not only in teaching their classes, but also in a wide range of community programs, and they often use the community as a resource. Many language teachers have the advantage of being able to communicate with non-English speaking parents and other community members on behalf of the school and the students. Those with exchange programs are particularly involved in administrative matters and have contact with the community, parents and school administrators.

Language associations exist at the local, state, regional, and national levels, and have provided support to their members, often making them aware of the social and political changes needed to improve schools. Leadership training has also been provided by many associations through their professional development programs.

There is, however, a need for much more training of the teacher corps at all levels to work with the concept of school-based management. Another necessary component for the success of this effort is the development of trust and understanding among all parties concerned.

Preparation, certification, recruitment, reward, and support of educators must assure an adequate supply of well-prepared professionals.

Improving teacher preparation mandates reconstructing the teacher education curriculum. Simply tinkering with requirements, organization patterns, or admissions standards is not enough. Educating teachers for active participation in ongoing school renewal is a key element. Consideration must be given to the inclusion of skills and habits of reflection and inquiry, of a vision and the reality of what is means to be a teacher, of the functions and purposes of schools in a democratic society, and of equal opportunity for all children.

Similar efforts to restructure in-service education or professional development must be made to support and retrain the present cadre of teachers who must be deeply involved in the process and content of their own continuing education.

If these components are included and their existence publicized, perhaps a sense of pride will again develop among educators, making recruitment of much needed language teachers possible. Remuneration of K-12 educators has increased in recent years and must continue to improve above the level of the cost of living adjustments.

Several language organizations have developed professional standards for their members including the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and the American Association of Teachers of French (AATF). ACTFL has developed provisional teacher education guidelines, the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese is completing its second draft, and the American Association of Teachers of German will begin work on a draft in the fall. These organizations are all looking to the work of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards which will over the next five years develop its voluntary certification standards in all areas and disciplines. [see Attachments C, F, R, and S]

Health and other human services, beginning with prenatal care and continuing throughout (adulthood) must be provided at a level sufficient to reduce significant barriers to learning.

One of the greatest barriers to learning confronted by a growing segment of the U.S. school age population is language, specifically a home language which differs from English, the dominant school language. We recommend that instruction in English as a second language and bilingual education be provided to all limited English proficient learners, beginning in preschool and continuing across the lifespan, for the purpose of reducing or eliminating the language barrier to learning.

Currently, only a small percentage of preschool children have access to bilingual education or English as a second language instruction taught by trained and certified professionals. Access to English as second language instruction by limited English proficient adults is even more restricted. Improved access to learning by reducing language barriers will result in lowered school dropout rates, increased literacy rates, and increased worker productivity.

There is also a misconception that bilingualism for students who have English as a second language places them at a disadvantage. Bilingualism for these students should be seen as a plus, and they should be used to support and assist in second language acquisition by their native English speaking peers. This would help raise the self-esteem of minorities who otherwise may feel alienated from American life. [see Attachment N]

Investments must be made in the use of technology to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

The rapid expansion of technology to meet educational needs provides a substantial opportunity to both improve and expand language instruction. The use of satellites and videotape can bring real-life experiences with language and culture into the classroom.

* The State of Hawaii has initiated a TELECLASS program through which second language students are matched with English-language students in

Japan, Korea, and other countries. Exposure to the target language is available through actual interaction between the two classes using slides and tapes, telephone conversations, electronic mail, video, and other media.

* Language students in Louisiana are able get first hand experience with both language and culture by watching actual news broadcasts from such places as East and West Germany and the Soviet Union. The broadcasts are available via satellite from Oklahoma State University, which rebroadcasts them for schools across the country.

Technology in the form of distance learning (satellite television and/or videotape in place of a classroom teacher) has also shown potential for bringing language instruction to small and rural school districts. However, the National Council of State Supervisors of Foreign Languages has stated concerns about the way in which this technology is being applied in some situations. These types of programs should only be used when qualified teachers who are proficient in the target language are not available. Further, these programs must ensure opportunities for students to use the language and receive appropriate feedback from the teacher. [see Attachment K]

* The Japanese distance learning program in Nebraska is a model for appropriate use of distance learning technology in bringing language instruction in a less-commonly taught language to rural communities which could not otherwise provide such instruction.

Finance and governance arrangements that are consistent with the above principles must be put in place.

We must promote state-federal-business partnerships and collaboration if we are to succeed in dramatically altering the status quo. A two-tiered approach is recommended:

a) to focus existing resources and structures; and

b) to develop new sources of support.

The first priority is to focus existing resources and standing administrative structures in order to provide strong international understanding and second language programs in public education. Colleges and universities should be encouraged to cooperate with the schools. Higher education in the states sets much of the educational agenda for the schools.

* Language education was the first disciplinary area to be addressed by the Academic Alliances project, linking schools and higher education in an on-going dialogue on professional issues and problems. The project is now being expanded to include other disciplines.

In the schools, the natural and social sciences must incorporate an international perspective as they address issues such as global warming, acid rain, world hunger, and the restoration of civil rights in newly emerging democracies:

* A program initiated by the University of Maryland Project has been adopted by the State of Maryland for dissemination in schools statewide.

Study abroad opportunities must be provided to students across disciplines and from all economic classes. There is no more effective vehicle for acquiring international understanding and second-language expertise. Outside of the educational system, state offices concerned with international trade, ecomomic development and related issues should become important contact points for interrelating business, science and technology, and educational interests. Businesses, which invest billions of dollars for employee training, should be called upon to devote attention, time and resources in reshaping programs which will ultimately benefit them. Business and industry partnerships with education are a proven mode of improving programs, and this model has been successful in Germany and Japan as well as in the U.S.

* The Virginia Department of Education has proposed a pilot Japanese School for seventh and eighth grade students in the Tidewater area. The program would draw upon the resources of the fifteen Japanese-owned businesses in the area. [see Attachment H]

As existing financing and governance structures become focused on particular educational goals, the resulting environment will increase the success rate of model projects aimed at specific innovations. The improved possibility of success, in turn, will greatly increase the likelihood that private and public agencies will contribute seed grants and continuing program support.

* Glastonbury, Connecticut received a one million dollar grant through the National Defense Education Act in 1958. An elementary foreign language program, Russian language program, and a language laboratory were all initiated with this funding. While federal dollars have long ceased to support these programs, the community's commitment to excellence has allowed all of them to continue to grow and flourish.

Conclusion

Recent concern for the quality of U.S. education has resulted in many new initiatives at the local, state and national levels. As we collectively initiate changes that will have immediate and long-lasting impact on these problems, we must use our successes, both past and present, to propel these efforts.

Language educators continue to play a vital role in the education of all students; recent initiatives by the language teaching profession provide examples of programs which may serve as models for emulation and replication.

Supporting Documents

A: What Is The "Oral Proficiency Interview"?

B: ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines

C: ACTFL Provisional Program Guidelines for Foreign Language Teacher Education

D: *California Framework for Foreign Language Instruction*

E: *The English Coalition Conference: Democracy through Language*

F: *Guidelines for the Certification and Preparation of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages in the United States*

G: *Languages of Thought: Thinking, Reading, and Foreign Languages*

H: *Linking Virginia with the World*

I: *MLA Newsletter*, Summer 1990, Vol. 22, No. 2

J: *Modern Languages for Communication*, New York State Syllabus

K: NCSSFL Statement on Distance Learning

L: *New York State Board of Regents Action Plan to Improve Elementary and Secondary Education Results in New York*

M: *P.E.A.L.S.*, Vol. 27, No. 1, Journal of the Colorado Congress of Foreign Language Teachers

N: *School Success for Limited English Proficient Students: The Challenge and State Response*

O: Second Languages and the Basics

P: *The State Board Connection, Issues in Brief*, Vol. 7, No. 7

Q: *The State of the States: State Initiatives in Foreign Language and International Studies, 1979-1989*

R: *The Teaching of French: A Syllabus of Competence*, the report of the Commission on Professional Standards, AATF

S: *TESOL Statement of Core Standards and Professional Preparation Programs*

T: *What We Can't Say Can Hurt Us*

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